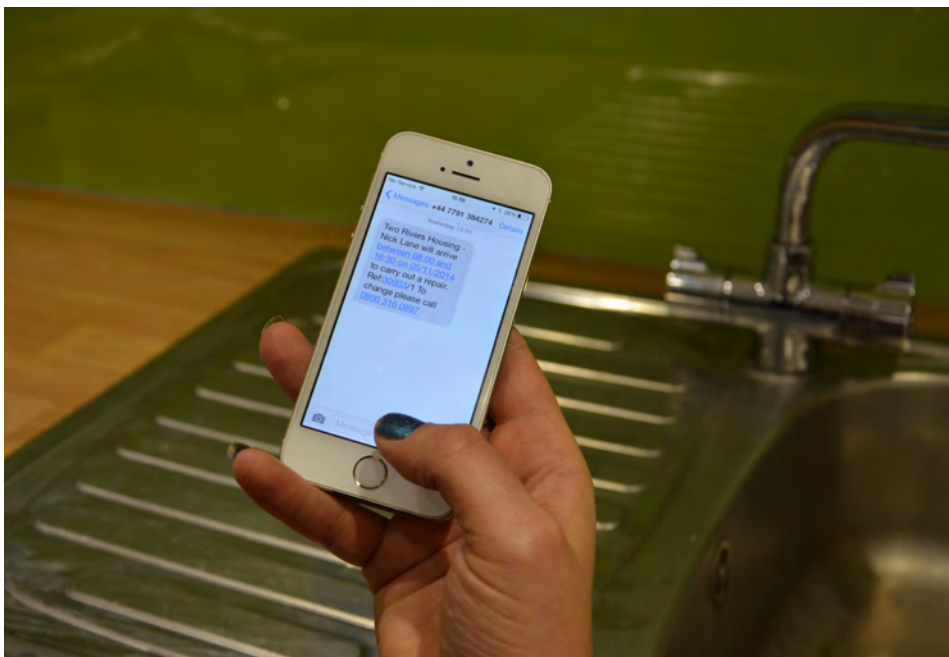


Tenant Topics

Newsletter for
Two Rivers Housing
Tenants



NEW TEXTING SERVICE



Our new texting service will keep you better informed.

Our repairs team has been going from strength-to-strength recently and we are managing to see more of you than ever due to a number of improvements.

One of these is the introduction of a new text messaging service, which allows you to change your appointment by a few easy clicks on your mobile phone.

When you book a repair with us, you will now receive a text reminder two days before the appointment. If this is no longer convenient, you can reply by

texting back 'change' and then a member of our staff will ring to arrange a new appointment. If you're happy with the time, simply text 'confirm'.

We will also text you the day before the appointment to tell you the name of the person who will be calling and what time he should arrive.

These reminders should make it more likely someone will be at home to let us in – meaning less wasted time for our operatives and more time fixing your repairs.

Winter 2014

Inside this issue....

- P3 Meet Coleford's own Santa!
- P5 Home check
- P7 90% are satisfied
- P8 Beat condensation
- P10 Win £100 cash
- P11 Free training for tenants
- P12 Changes to benefits

When the work is complete, you will receive one more text to find out if you were 'satisfied' or 'dissatisfied', giving us information that will help us to improve the service to all our customers.

We are hoping to use this text messaging system in many other ways too. If you have any suggestions about how texting could improve our service to you, please let us know by emailing **customerservices@2rh.org.uk** or calling **0800 316 0897**.



**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
from all at Two Rivers Housing**



www.tworivershousing.org.uk

NEW WEB FEATURES FOR YOU

The Two Rivers website is being given a complete makeover and, not only will it look different when it is launched, but a range of new features should make it easier to find what you need.

The 'Tenant log-in' and self-service area is being expanded and will continue to grow over time, giving you more control. It will also be clearly signposted from the Home page, so you can go straight to it.

When the site goes live in the spring you'll be able to see your rent and service charge history, information about your tenancy, a record of repairs carried out at your property

and a schedule of when works are expected to be carried out, such as bathroom, kitchen and window replacement, plus the date when your next service is due. You will also be able to clearly see who your key Two Rivers contacts are.

We will be offering a new callback facility, whereby you can specify a time for us to call you (during office hours), and we are also going to introduce live web chat, so you can discuss your issues with us in real-time, online.

We know that many people view information when they're on the move, so the site has been designed to be easily



A mock-up of the new-style Two Rivers Housing website.

viewed and used from a mobile phone or a tablet.

Look out for more news in the spring.

PLAY SAFELY AT CHRISTMAS

Christmas holidays are just around the corner and, if the weather is kind, the children will be keen to be outdoors.

Two Rivers has a number of building sites around the Forest that will be shut over the festive period and, although they will be fenced off and padlocked, they could still prove tempting to young explorers.

Please remind your children and grandchildren building sites are not play areas. They are dangerous – even more so if there is rain, ice or snow on the ground – and many young people are hurt or even killed on them each year.

For example, building materials such as bricks, pipes and



Please keep your children away from building site danger.

sand could collapse, and sand may have glass or other sharp objects hidden inside. The ground is uneven, concealed wires and cables are trip hazards and, although diggers and trucks look like fabulous giant toys, they should not be played on or near.

And if there is an accident, how long before the alarm is raised?

In short, building sites are not safe places for children to play.

SANTA LIVES IN COLEFORD!

We've just discovered Father Christmas lives in one of our homes in Coleford!

Santa, who goes by the name of Steve Wilson for the rest of the year, has travelled around the world being the jolly, rosy-cheeked fella for many years.

It all started when his daughter showed him an advert in a national newspaper asking for 'real bearded Santa's.' At the time Steve only had a grey goatee but, with persuasion from his family and a little help from a hired suit and beard, he became Father Christmas for the very first time.



By the following Christmas he not only had a full, fluffy white beard, but also an agent and was entertaining children the length and breadth of the

country. Since then, he has "ho ho ho'd" for the Grenadier Guards and even travelled to Kenya in his role.

Although he's hung up his professional robes, you can still find Steve... ahem, we mean Santa... volunteering for the Children's Opportunity Centre in Coleford, Lydney Town Hall and Coinros Nursery. He also spreads festive cheer on Christmas morning at the Dilke Hospital.

Santa Steve said: "I really enjoy the innocent enchantment in the children's eyes. I love to keep the magic alive at Christmas. I even convince the parents!"

KENSLEY'S CAKE CONQUERS ALL!

It takes more than a bit of thunder, lightning and a blustery wind to deter the residents of Kensley Vale from a cup of tea and a slice of cake.

Despite the early introduction to autumn – which required a last-minute marquee replacement and emergency kettle contingencies – the residents' inaugural 'meet your neighbours' event was a great success.

Kensley Vale, in Cinderford, does not have a communal meeting place, but the temporary shelter did not dampen the team spirit.



Kensley Vale residents enjoy their cake, despite the weather!

With a display of cooking skills to rival the Bake-Off finalists, there was a feast of cakes and buns to tempt residents out of their homes and into the marquee in the middle of the scheme.

Housing Assistant Gina Facchiano, who helped to organise it, with vital support from residents Mary Tingle and Gordon Blewitt, hopes this was the first event of many.

CENTIGEN BRANCHES OUT

Centigen, our new subsidiary company, had a great first summer – cutting grass around our estates and cleaning our HomePlus schemes and the Two Rivers HQ, Rivers Meet.

The facilities management company has taken on lots of duties for Two Rivers, which previously external contractors provided. They are now starting to branch out and deliver these services to other organisations.

The more Centigen grows, the more we will be able to invest back into our residents' homes and communities, as all of its profits are gifted back to Two

Rivers. Martin Tregoning has recently joined the team to start drumming up new business and with a history of sales, we're sure he's just the man!

Just like Two Rivers Housing, Centigen has set up a Board to help guide the new enterprise. The Board currently comprises five members, which includes Two Rivers executives, independent professionals with commercial and facilities management experience and housing experts.

The Chair of Centigen's Board, David Garnett said: "It's really exciting to be part of Centigen."



There are a huge number of possibilities for the company to progress and I'm looking forward to seeing this. This new venture will help Two Rivers improve its services and homes as well as provide the opportunity to build new affordable homes for future generations."

COME AND JOIN US!



The Disability and Carers Forum is ready to welcome new members.

Did you know Two Rivers has a group set up and run by residents to give support to people with a disability and their carers?

The group has notched up some notable successes over the years by campaigning to get drop-kerbs put in, disabled parking and access routes cleared, pedestrian crossings

installed and inconsiderate parking issues addressed. All achieved by working together, with the council and – on occasion – the local MP.

The Disability and Carers Forum was set up to offer friendship, support, information and campaigning strength to people of all ages. The meetings are a great opportunity to get together for support and find out about

services available; they also show people they don't have to cope alone.

"We are keen to welcome new people of all ages to our group," explained Gill Robins, the group's Chair. "Don't feel you are not disabled enough or you don't have sufficient caring duties. Just come along, see what we can do and we'll help if we can."

The group meets in a different location within the district every two months, usually making use of the Two Rivers communal rooms. Transport can be arranged.

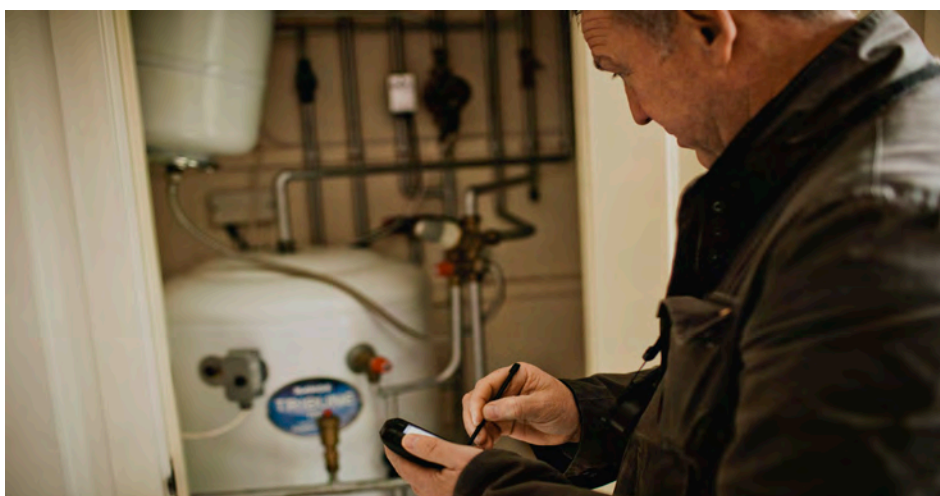
If you would like to find out more, please contact Gill Robins at gillsnest35@yahoo.co.uk or call us at the office (0800 316 0897) and we'll pass a message on to her.

CHECKING CONDITION OF HOMES

We are looking at the condition of all Two Rivers homes to make sure the details we have about each property is up-to-date and accurate.

Our surveyors are looking at the age and condition of every aspect, from kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems, to roofs, windows and doors – and everything inbetween! The information gathered will be used to work out when maintenance and improvements are due.

The visit should take between 30 minutes and one hour and, although much of it can be completed outside, someone over 16 years old needs to



We will be checking the age and condition of your heating system.

allow us indoors to look at other things on our checklist.

All visits are carried out by appointment, so please be prepared for us to phone you over the coming months to arrange a convenient time for

our visit. And, if you have any questions about your property, please speak to our surveyors while they are there and they will try to help you.

Thank you for your co-operation.

SCHEME SUPPORTS VILLAGE FUTURE

A housing development in Dymock is breathing new life into the village, helping to secure its future prosperity by enhancing local amenities.

The £3 million scheme is delivering much-needed affordable homes for rent and shared ownership and the

package also includes a car park, footpath, play area and canal basin.

The drive for the scheme came from the parish council and residents, recognising it would help to revitalise the school, increase tourism, recreation and the local economy.

The scheme at Western Way will offer a mixture of houses, flats and bungalows for sale, for low-cost rent, shared ownership and market rent when they complete early in 2016. Two Rivers will own 14 of them. 11 will be let at affordable rents, and the other three will be available for shared ownership.

Development Director Matt Hunt, praised the foresight and vision of the village, recently named Village of the Year.

“Many villages view additional housing as a threat, but Dymock recognised moderate growth is vital to its prosperity and will help to keep it alive and preserve the services and amenities it already enjoys. I’m sure the village will be pleased it took this bold step to safeguard its future.”

Please get in touch if you would like to find out more about the new homes.



An architect's drawing of the homes being built at Dymock.

COFFEE + CAKE = CHARITY CASH

Residents in our communal schemes are amongst the best when it comes to raising money – and particularly when it involves hot drinks and slices of cake!



"Cheers!" from George Place.

The ladies and gentlemen at Wynols Close in Broadwell managed to collect a superb £180 for Macmillan at their event – which included a jewellery sale – whilst over at George Place in Berry Hill, there was even more drinking and munching going on, bringing in a whopping £250 for the same cause.

Well done to everyone who took part.



Happiness is a cup of coffee and a piece of cake – at Wynols Close.

SAY HELLO, **WAVE GOODBYE**



Is it a wedding? No it's a joint retirement! Garry King (left) leads the thanks and good wishes to retiring Board members Ann Christian and David Garnett.

It has been a privilege to have David Garnett on the Two Rivers Board for the past 13 years, but he has now stepped down as Chair and the reins have been handed to a new David - David Powell.

David Garnett was a dedicated and extremely experienced chairman, having spent most of his life researching, writing and teaching all aspects of housing policy and practice. He volunteered a huge amount of his time and provided us with a wealth of knowledge and advice over the years. We're pleased to say we won't be losing David, as he is staying involved as a 'Friend' of Two Rivers, and will continue to chair the Centigen Board.

Our new Two Rivers Board Chair has big shoes to fill, but we're sure David Powell will step up to the plate, particularly with five years' experience of our Board already under his belt. David is

a qualified accountant who has worked in local government for over 20 years, and his day-job is Strategic Director of Resources at Powys Council.

Along with David Garnett, we also wished Ann Christian, one of our Tenant Board Members, goodbye as she retired after eight years of service and commitment to the Board. We wish her well for the future.

Board Members are appointed for their special skills, experience and knowledge but there are other groups tenants can get involved in, for example, our Resident Scrutiny Group, Disability and Carers Forum and Equality and Diversity Group.

If you are interested in being involved, please contact Emma Towler, our Community Involvement Co-ordinator, for more information on **0800 316 0897**.

SATISFACTION ON THE UP

We are delighted to report you have given us an overall satisfaction rate of 90% for the service we provide, in our most recent survey.

One of our best improvements has been in our repairs and maintenance service, which saw a very pleasing 6% increase in satisfaction between July and September. We have recently introduced several changes to our service (including the one reported on the front page), and it's great to see this reflected in your feedback.

Satisfaction with the service charge as value-for-money has also increased.

Unfortunately, not everything we do is perfect as satisfaction has fallen in a few areas, including being able to get



Renata Douglas is just one of our tenants who is thrilled with her new kitchen.

hold of the right person and being kept informed.

Some dissatisfied tenants helped us to understand exactly why they weren't happy, and two of them were selected to receive vouchers as a thank you.

We are grateful to everyone who takes part in our regular surveys.

They are an important way for us to find out what you think, and focus our attention on improvements.

The results give us confidence we are getting some important things right but we will keep looking for ways to improve our service to you.

MAKE YOUR MONEY GO FURTHER

How well are you managing your household budget? Are you claiming everything you're entitled to? If your expenses are more than your income, then our Welfare and Debt Advisors could help.

Rebecca James and Gwyn Yarlett supported 264 Two Rivers households in the first six months of this year, helping them to claim more than £200,000 in benefits and manage £30,000 of tenants'

debts, helping them to budget better in future.

Together, they have made a massive difference to many of our tenants' lives. If you think this free and totally confidential service could help you, please email **customerservices@2rh.org.uk** or call **0800 316 0897** to make an appointment.

* Have you received your £12 Government Electricity Rebate yet? Everyone who has electricity



in their home will receive this and it should happen automatically. But if you have a pre-payment meter and haven't received it yet, contact your electricity supplier to request it.

PUTTING VICTIMS FIRST

The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 includes a new measure which gives victims and communities a say in the way anti-social behaviour is dealt with.

The Case Review gives victims an opportunity to request a review of their case if they feel they have not been dealt with appropriately.

You can ask for your case to be reviewed by filling in an online form that you can find at **www.restorativegloucestershire.co.uk** or by calling **01452 754555**.



Our Tenancy Compliance Officers Julia Watson and Andrew Larkin discuss a case with PCSO Louise Littleton-Borg.

If you would like more information about this, please contact Andrew Larkin or

Julia Watson, our Tenancy Compliance Officers.

BEAT WINTER CONDENSATION

Winter brings a whole host of exciting things – Christmas, snow, parties and good food – but cold weather also brings the number one cause of mould – condensation.

Condensation is the tiny droplets you often see on cold surfaces, such as windows or mirrors, and happens when there is a sharp change in temperature.

There's always moisture in the air, even when you can't see it. Having a shower produces two pints, cooking generates six pints, drying clothes indoors makes nine pints and even just two people breathing can create three pints!

All this water has to go somewhere and there are several things you can do to prevent it ending up as mould.



Condensation – the scourge of cold weather, but there's lots we can do to prevent it.

- Hang washing outside to dry when possible. In bad weather hang it in your bathroom with a window slightly open and/or extractor fan on. Do not dry them on a radiator as this creates a lot of condensation.
- Keep pan lids on and use as little water as possible when cooking or boiling the kettle. Ventilate your kitchen for 20 minutes after cooking, keeping a window open slightly and/or using your extractor fan.

- Ventilate bedrooms and other living areas with trickle vents or slightly open windows.
- Avoid using bottled gas heaters as they generate large amounts of moisture.
- Don't overfill wardrobes and cupboards as this reduces air circulation and causes mildew on clothes.
- Air movement helps cut condensation. Keep a gap between furniture and walls.
- Maintain a constant moderate temperature rather than short blasts of high heat.

Prevention is better than cure but, if you've got it, you can use fungicidal wash and sprays and redecorate using fungicidal and anti-condensation paint.

BLAKENEY SCHEME IS PRAISED

Community projects in Blakeney came to the attention of a national judging panel last month and earned a 'Highly Commended' from the panel of experts.

Hopes were high that the Blakeney Community Green projects, which Two Rivers has been supporting for several years, would scoop the top 'Community Achievement' trophy, but we narrowly lost out at the final hurdle to a scheme in London.



Flash back to the early days of the project, with its first funding success in 2012.

Rose Peaty, who has been at the helm of the village projects, joined Two Rivers staff Jane

Cordier and Rachel Smith at the event in Birmingham.

THE ROSE OF ROWANDEAN

Sylvia Cotterell will remain firmly – and fragrantly – in the memories of her former neighbours, thanks to a floral tribute planted in her honour.

The golden rambler rose will trail up the side of the communal centre at Rowandean, where Mrs Cotterell used to live. And the location is particularly fitting, as her friends all remember her sitting at the front door of her bungalow, from where the rose will be in full view.

Mrs Cotterell was the HomePlus Forum representative at Rowandean, and also ran the Wednesday Club.

When she died last autumn, her family asked for donations in lieu



Paul Bodkin provides the muscle to plant the rose, ably supported by Meg Hart (far left) and her neighbours.

of flowers to go to Rowandean, and the residents held a collection to top this up and buy the rose. Neighbourhood Assistant Paul Bodkin and resident Meg Hart helped to plant it on behalf of the tenants.

They'll be looking forward to seeing it flourish in the spring.

DO TELL!

Do you eagerly wait for your copy of Tenant Topics to come through your letterbox or appear in your email inbox? We'd love it if you did – but with everything, there is always room for improvement!

We are looking for feedback on this newsletter and would like to know your thoughts - good and bad!

There are just nine questions that should take less than 10 minutes to answer. To tell us what you think, please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DVRY66D>.

We would really appreciate your feedback!

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

A £12½ million investment in improving the energy-efficiency of our homes is finally complete – thanks to the co-operation of many of our tenants.

By the time the final nine new homes were built at Pylers Way in Lydney, we had replaced 40 defective pre-fabricated homes with 80 modern properties.

A further 124 'Cornish' homes had benefited from major refurbishment and upgrading, bringing them up to current standards.

All 204 homes have improved insulation and other features which make them cheaper to run.

This massive project relied heavily upon the support of tenants, who were fully involved in the design of their new homes and moved to temporary accommodation during construction. We are grateful to everyone who helped.

Stewart Watkins was delighted when he was offered one of the new homes at Pylers Way, and moved his family there in June.



David Garnett marks completion of this major project in time-honoured tradition.

"I jumped at it with both hands because Two Rivers is a good housing association, and renting through them gives us stability that private landlords just don't offer," he said. "I really like the house. It's ideal for what we want and everything is brand new."

A plaque was unveiled at Pylers Way by our former Chair, David Garnett, to commemorate completion of the project.



Annika, Elidelma, Liam and Stewart Watkins enjoy their first summer in their new Two Rivers home

TELL US WHAT MATTERS

If you have a survey, repair or maintenance works in the coming weeks, we will ask you to complete a short Quality of Home survey at the end of our visit.

There are just three questions, and your answers will tell us what aspects of a home are most important to you. This will help us decide how we spend our maintenance budget so that it matches the priorities of our tenants as closely as possible.

For this reason, one of the questions is about annual household income, as we know the cost of heating is an important issue for many of our tenants. Please be reassured the information will not be used for any other purposes.

We will be very grateful if you can spare a couple of minutes to complete the survey and let us know what home improvement works are most important to you.

WIN £100

You should have received your calendar with this issue of Tenant Topics.

Don't forget you could win £100 if you fill in the short questionnaire and return it to us before Friday 27 February.

It will only take a couple of minutes, and just think what you could do with the cash!

PROMOTING THE FOREST

Two Rivers helped to shout about how great the Forest of Dean is at an event at the House of Commons to showcase the area.

We joined other businesses and community groups to promote the best this part of Gloucestershire has to offer to a wide group of MPs.

"We were keen to show how Two Rivers contributes to local prosperity," explained Chief Executive, Garry King. "Not only do we let homes and improve amenities, but we also provide jobs and business for our suppliers."

The visit included a meeting with Shadow Housing Minister Emma Reynolds, MP. They



The Two Rivers team at the House of Commons with Baroness Jan Royall (third from left).

talked about the problems of increasing demand – particularly for smaller properties – and the shortage of affordable homes.

"We described the pressures people face in putting an affordable roof over their heads,

and how young people, in particular, are struggling," said Garry.

"We are helping by creating smaller, flexible living spaces, and building homes which are cheaper to run, but more needs to be done at national level."

FREE TRAINING FOR TENANTS

There's not much you can get for free these days, but we're offering training – exclusively for our tenants – that won't cost a penny.

Two Rivers has a track record of supporting work and training opportunities and our health and safety team is now offering free training on topics such as asbestos awareness, manual handling, safe use of ladders and risk assessments.

Anyone living in a Two Rivers property and working in the construction or property maintenance sector, or seeking

to go into the sector and is either self-employed, a school leaver or a job seeker, is invited to join one or more of the courses at our office on Sundays in January, February and March.

You will need to make your own transport and lunch arrangements, although other refreshments will be provided.

Places are limited to 15 candidates and allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. To find out more, or to book your place, contact us on **customerservices@2rh.org.uk** or call **0800 316 0897**.



Ladder safety is an important part of health and safety learning.

BENEFITS PAYMENT CHANGES

Universal Credit, the new single monthly benefits payment for people in and out of work, is coming to our area next year.

The payment merges and replaces the following benefits and tax credits:

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

The national roll-out begins in February and we expect it to start arriving at local Job

Centres in the spring. They will start assessing claims for Universal Credit for single, working age people making new claims for any of the benefits outlined in this article..



It looks as though this will affect all other existing benefit claimants during 2016 and 2017, but we will let you know when we have more details. Meanwhile, take a look at <http://ucpp.dwp.gov.uk/universal-credit-preparation/>.

Universal Credit will be paid monthly and in arrears, usually directly into your bank or building society so, if you don't already have an account, you need to open one. Housing Benefit will be included within the payment, so you must make your own arrangements to pay your rent, to avoid falling into arrears. The easiest way is through Direct Debit and there are cash benefits for setting this up.

If you have any questions about Universal Credit, bank accounts or Direct Debit, please speak to your Income Collection Advisor or one of our Welfare and Debt Advisors on **0800 316 0897**.

STAY ACTIVE THIS WINTER

Don't hibernate this winter – get out and enjoy some of the many activities going on at our HomePlus schemes!

There's no excuse to get bored, just because of the colder and darker days – there's so much going on in each of our 21 schemes.

With a variety of activities, from bingo and Zumba to coffee mornings and raffles, you can get out, stay active and socialise. We also have a Wii, which is an easy-to-use games console which allows you to play tennis, golf or bowling – all from



Residents at Western Way in Dymock have really taken to exercising using the Wii.

the comfort and warmth of your local communal lounge.

To find out what activities are taking place in your local HomePlus scheme, please

speaking to your Neighbourhood Assistant.

So don't stay cooped up indoors – get out and have some fun!

Contact us:

If you want this in large print, on audio CD or in another language.

Freephone **0800 316 0897** for landline Or lower cost **0300 100 0896** for mobile users.

Join the Two Rivers community on



@TRHousing and



Registered Charity No1104723